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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: NEW POLITICAL PARTY, PIPE DREAM, OR
OTHER?

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: A Kazakhstani functionary with an intriguing resume says he wants to found a Green Party of Kazakhstan. We are unsure if he is a sincere big dreamer, or if he might possibly have ties to others who want to challenge the current government and curry favor with the West. If nothing else, he seems to be representative of the successor generation who are tired of the status quo. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) During the Kazakhstan Investment Forum in New York City on November 23, the Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industries of Kazakhstan, Serikzhan Mambetalin, asked to see the Ambassador privately. He said he had never expected to enter politics, but "now's the time." He once had been a great believer in President Nazarbayev, he said, "but it's now time for him to share power and let others do something good for the country." He added that many in Kazakhstan think as he does and would like to express their political views, "but they have too many obligations" -- i.e., have bought into and are beholden to the current system.

SOMETHING TO UNITE SOCIETY

14. (SBU) Asked to describe his own political views, Mambetalin said that, if anything, he's "a Green Party type" in favor of the environment and social welfare. He said, "This is not the time to focus on sharp political issues. It's better to find a common cause that can unite ethnic Russians and Kazakhs, Christians and Muslims. Mambetalin suggested that students "have enormous potential but are unfocused and, thus, susceptible to Islamic radicalism, especially since Kazakhstan has no common ideology to consolidate society." He judged that the current generation of young adults has "no memory of the past, nothing that grabs their attention. They need a modern, popular way to focus their energy." Mambetalin said he would like to propose a Green Party of Kazakhstan to President Nursultan Nazarbayev to support the president's intention to build a

civic identity for all Kazakhstanis.

15. (SBU) Mambetalin emphasized that he wants to found a political party, not just an NGO because "NGOs are not considered to be serious." He said he has found "broad support for his idea, except at the very top." For example, he said, he pitched his idea in June to then-Foreign Minister Tazhin, who allegedly told Mambetalin that he liked the idea but warned that it would be rather difficult to approach President Nazarbayev with such an initiative. Mambetalin said he never heard back from Tazhin. When asked if he thought he could gain legal registration for a Green Party, Mambetalin admitted it would be hard to register a new party, and so he might merge his party into the already registered Ruhaniyat Party.

"WE MUST BECOME A NORWAY!"

16. (SBU) "What's important," Mambetalin said, "is that Kazakhstan is at a turning point. As an oil-rich country, we can choose to be a Norway or a Nigeria. We must become a Norway!" Changing tack, Mambetalin said, "Of course, as a Green Party we will have to focus on the north Caspian Sea. At a certain point, we will have to raise the danger to the environment of drilling in the the ecologically sensitive Caspian." During the investment forum session devoted to gas and oil, Mambetalin asked U.S. industry executives why they had not yet fulfilled their commitment to establish an incident-response center at Atyrau, which is the center for TengizChevroil activity. A Chevron representative replied that, in fact, the center is currently being established.

BIO NOTE

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17. (SBU) Mambetalin described his background. By education, he said, he is a medical doctor, but for the past seven years he has been working in London as a crude oil trader. Between those two -- doctor and oil trader -- he said he had earned an MBA at the prestigious KIMEP in Almaty, had worked for the World Bank for several years, and had been an adviser at various times to current Prime Minister Karim Masimov, as well as having served as Deputy Chairman for Financial Services at Kazakhstan's Postal Savings. Mambetalin emphasized that he is "a self-made man" but not wealthy, and "not beholden to any oligarchical group." His family still lives in London, but he says is "ready to return home."

COMMENT

18. (SBU) While it could well be that Mambetalin is sincere, even if a dreamer with a big idea, it seems that several things would suggest caution. First, Mels Yeleusizov, the leader of the environmental NGO "Tabigat," officially announced his intention to found a Green Party in March and established a web site on which people can sign up. Second, Mambetalin's approach to the Ambassador seemed unnecessarily secretive. He insisted on finding an isolated and empty parlor in the Harvard Club, where the investment forum was taking place, because he wanted to be sure no Kazakhstani officials saw him talking to the Ambassador, "especially Ambassador (to the United States) Idrissov." Third, because of his time in London, we have to wonder if he might possibly have ties to exiled former Prime Minister Kazhegeldin and exiled Chairman of BTA Bank Ablyazov, both of whom continue to use their considerable ill-gotten financial resources to plot "democratic alternatives" to President Nazarbayev, mainly for Western consumption. In fact, the ideals of a Green Party might find a certain amount of support in Kazakhstan, but it could not come into being, given the current political environment, unless it were officially blessed -- and we doubt that will happen anytime soon. If nothing else, Mambetalin seems to be representative of the successor generation who are tired of the status quo. END

COMMENT.
HOAGLAND